

A D D R E S S

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Working Men of Pittsburgh,

TO THEIR

FELLOW WORKING MEN

IN

PENNSYLVANIA.

PITTSBURGH:

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1856.

ADDRESS.

The undersigned, working men of the city of Pittsburgh, convinced that our interests as a class are seriously involved in the present political struggle, send greeting to you, our fellow working men of Pennsylvania, asking your aid in the protection of our common rights, now in great peril. We hold it to be a part of the system of free government, that each class of the people should understand and uphold its own rights. Concessions in matters of subordinate importance must be made for the sake of general harmony and the public welfare, but when a question arises involving the political equality of a class, or the constitutional rights of its individual members, stern resistance becomes a duty.

"Eternal vigilance,"—vigilance of the people against their leaders—"is the price of liberty." So we are told by one of those leaders—one of the foremost among the founders of our constitution. Fellow working men, we believe that this vigilance is called for now. We believe that a great scheme is in progress which endangers our most cherished rights. We call upon you to look to your interests yourselves, judging by facts as they stand, and disregarding party prejudices and interested, office hunting advisers. Some of these facts, it is the object of this Address to lay before you. We are neither politicians nor office seekers. We would speak with you as brothers: if we err, let us meet with a brotherly forgiveness; if we speak the words of truth and soberness, let us have the hand of brotherhood in the coming contest.

Look then at the facts.

In another section of our country exists a practical aristocracy, owning Labor, and made thereby independent of us. With them Labor is servitude, and freedom is only compatible with mastership. They despise us. They call us "Greasy

Mechanics," "Filthy Operatives," and "small Farmers doing their own drudgery," and "unfit to associate with a southern gentleman's body servant,"—and being gentlemen, no doubt they believe what they say. The political power of that section is in their hands, from the ignorant and depressed condition of our fellow working men there—the "poor whites," as they call them. These aristocrats desire to extend this system over all the territories of the nation. To extend it over the territories is to give them supreme power in the government, and then they will extend it over us, and as one of them has boasted, they will "call the roll of their slaves on Bunker Hill."

Free working men of Pennsylvania, shall they do it? The present Presidential contest is to decide. The best informed of all parties now concede that our State has the casting vote. We know that with us, the working men, lies the power to cast the vote of this State as we choose. For whom shall it be given?

Naturally, we look to the great Democratic Party, the avowed champion of the rights of man. Twice it has stood in the breach for us. Under Jefferson, it struck down federalism, and asserted the true democratic principle of the right and the ability of the masses to govern themselves. Under Jackson it conquered the combination which sought, by chartered privileges to capital, to give it an undue advantage over labor. Endeared to the people by these great services to them and to the cause of freedom, we turn, in this our third great struggle, to our tried champion. Under what banner does he now fight our battle?

"Non-interference with slavery in the Territories, or in the District of Columbia."—*Cincinnati Platform, seventh resolution.*

The whole territory of the Union made as free and secure to the slaveholder as is now the District of Columbia!

To hide from us the full extent of this wholesale surrender of the rights of the working men, they tell us that each new formed State may prohibit slavery by the popular vote. That is, it *must* be a slave State until ready for admission—then it *may* abolish slavery. Do any of the slave States abolish slavery? But it is needless to argue that the present Democratic Party is fighting the cause of the slaveholder. The

simple fact that almost the entire force of the South—certainly twelve out of fifteen States—is ranged under its banner, ought to be enough for conviction.

But again, they tell us that all this must be suffered in the sacred cause of equality under the Constitution. Brethren, consider this.

The slaveholder must be allowed to go into the territories with his *property*, no matter of what kind. The *working man* of the North cannot go there with his *personal dignity* and *self respect*. Is this equality?

The slaveholder goes there, and his wealth makes it easy to educate his children where he pleases. The *working man* goes, but how are *his* children to be educated? Slavery abhors the “abomination of free schools.” Knowledge for the Rich, Ignorance for the Poor! Is this equality?

The slaveholder may go there and cover his thousands of acres with slave tillage, finding new lands again when those he holds are desolated by this baneful system. To insure him this advantage, the broad western plains are to be taken from the free working man, although, with this refuge gone, low wages and dependence must be his portion. Shut out from slave territories by his self-respect, which obliges him to shun competition with slave labor, his condition in the overcrowded free States soon resembles that of the working man of Europe. Low wages for freemen that slaves may be profitable! Is this equality?

The slaveholder going there, is to carry with him a property qualification. For every five slaves owned by him he is to have three extra votes. What qualification can the working man of the free States acquire that shall enable him to offset this advantage? None. Is this equality?

Free working men of Pennsylvania! need we ask you if you will support a party with such principles as these? Is it not the combination of this party with the Southern aristocrats which makes them dangerous to us?

How then shall we break down this great combination, and avert the danger which threatens us? Whatever attachment some of us may have had, or do now have, for the American party, we are convinced that an overshadowing issue, dwarfing all minor questions, now demands a settlement. It cannot be

postponed. To neglect it is to forsake it. If we would preserve the liberties for which our fathers fought and died, we must now strike—once for all—a blow at this aristocrat conspiracy. To make the blow effectual, we must unite with all the friends of freedom of whatever name or party, postponing, for the time, every minor issue.

Such was the aim of the convention which nominated John C. Fremont. Disavowing all connection with past issues, it called upon the friends of freedom, in all the parties, to unite in opposition to slavery aggression. In direct opposition to the Democratic platform, it resolved as follows:

“We deny the authority of Congress, of a territorial legislature, of any individual, or association of individuals, to give legal existence to slavery in any territory of the United States, while the present constitution shall be maintained.”

Here, fellow working men, we find *our* platform, and under this banner have we enlisted to fight the battle of the rights of man. If we have spoken the truth, come and join us! If we have truly stated the danger which threatens us and our posterity, if we have truly set forth the remedy against it, can you help but join us?

We who address you, have passed through the same ordeal to which we invoke you. Those of us who were Democrats, have been forced to sever the ties which bound us to the party we have loved and trusted. We have been forced to disown the regular party nominations and the regular party platform. Those of us who were formerly Whigs, have been forced to accept as our candidate John C. Fremont, who has always been and is a Democrat, solely differing from that party now on the policy of the Pierce administration and the recently adopted platform. Those of us who were Americans, have been forced to forego, for the present, that party organization under which we had hoped to carry out our peculiar principles. We have all laid aside minor differences in the face of a great danger which has overshadowed minor questions, and have pledged ourselves to an alliance for the preservation of the territories against slavery. We have been met with the cry of sectionalism, fanaticism, abolitionism; but we are not alarmed. On our side, proclaiming the same principles, in language too plain to be misunderstood, are Washington, Jefferson, Franklin,

Adams, Monroe, Jackson, Clay and Webster. With these guides, we feel that we have not gone astray.

You call yourselves free men. Think freely now on this great question. Cast away old prejudices, beware of designing leaders. Study the truth for yourselves, satisfy your minds on the basis of facts and common sense alone, and then strike for yourselves, your fellow working men, your Country and the Right.

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